



# Echoes of Memory Volume 6



In the forward to his 1976 memoir entitled, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, wrote,

Enlightenment is not the same as clarification. I had no clarity when I was writing this little book, I do not have it today, and I hope I never will. Clarification would also amount to disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to aid in preventing precisely this. For nothing is resolved, no conflict is settled. No remembering has become a mere memory. (Améry, 1976, p. xi)

The Holocaust survivor's work of witnessing is never complete. There is no clarity found through writing about the personal experience of the Holocaust that allows for the writer to stop approaching memory—for memory to stop rushing back. The longevity of our writing group, begun in 2001, attests to the importance survivor writers feel that the “case,” as Améry writes, must remain unsettled. Because of this, survivors continue to describe the Holocaust, as it happened to them. Readers too nor will/neither will not find a way to resolve the accounts they read here. Memory and writing both, in this way, are the casting back, which affect our movements forward. The work of memory and writing done by the writers of The Memory Project—the essays of which become *Echoes of Memory*—forges a connection with a reader, that won't allow for survivor “remembering” to become “mere memory.” It is through the “felt-sense” of what these survivors describe that a reader might be changed, through reading, to help effect a better future.

The work of memoir writing is different from historical documentation in their differing purposes; personal writing differs too in that the writing compiled here often tells the stories of individual moments. These are stories of details. There is a faked diamond ring, made from the crystals of a broken chandelier, used to pay a farmer to hide a man and his family, in the piece entitled “The Diamond and The Cow,” by Marcel Drimer. There is the extra slip of paper that allows a young girl entrance to a ghetto, postponing her deportation, in the account by Nesse Godin entitled “The Kindnesses.” There is the reunion of two friends from summer camp who meet again in Auschwitz, as told in the narrative from Ruth Cohen, entitled “Life Changes.” These particular moments in time, these chance encounters in the chronicles of survivors, are details that changed the lives of each of the tellers, and are intimately human in their scale.

It is this individual scale, the personal account of the Holocaust, that may be the impetus for a reader to feel and to be moved toward action for the future. This approach of reader to the writer's experience is one that happens through language, through detail in narrative, through the communication of story, and is one that survivor writers aim for a more just world. Being engaged in this writing process, a process that causes memory of the past to inscribe itself in the present, for the future, is the work I have been privileged to be a part of for the last twelve years. It is the work of the survivor writers who share their experiences in this sixth volume of *Echoes of Memory*.

—Maggie Peterson  
Writing Instructor, The Memory Project

# Echoes of Memory

## CONTENTS

RUTH COHEN	
Freedom in Holysov	4
Life Changes	5
MARCEL DRIMER	
Coincidences of Life	7
The Diamond and the Cow	8
ERIKA ECKSTUT	
Coming to the United States	10
My Grandfather	11
MANYA FRIEDMAN	
Deceptive Expectations	13
Through a Wire Fence	14
NESSE GODIN	
Mama Picking My Husband, Jack	15
The Kindnesses	16
LOUISE LAWRENCE-ISRAËLS	
Light	17
Trust	17
HARRY MARKOWICZ	
Liberation Day	19
Revisiting Memories	19
HALINA YASHAROFF PEABODY	
The Happiest Day in My Life	21
CHARLENE SCHIFF	
Don't Ask for Soap	23
Kasia	23
ESTHER STAROBIN	
Aunt Hannah	25
The Last Letter	26
ALFRED TRAUM	
The Kiddush Cup	27
SUSAN WARSINGER	
The Errand	29
The Tray	29
MARTIN WEISS	
From Ashes to Life	32
Life in the DP Camps	33



## Freedom in Holysov

RUTH COHEN

*Ruth Cohen, from Mukachevo, Czechoslovakia, was first imprisoned with her sister in Auschwitz in April 1944, then several other concentration and work camps beginning in October of the same year.*

In February 1945, I was one of 500 women shipped from a concentration camp in Nuremberg, Germany, after it was totally destroyed by constant bombing. We arrived at Holysov, Czechoslovakia, near Plzen. Some 250 of the women were Jewish and 250 were political prisoners from Poland and Russia.

There were three barracks in the camp. The Jewish women were housed in the second barrack. We slept on bunk beds, two people sharing each bed. The beds were just wooden planks without mattresses. Most guards were members of the Wehrmacht (German armed forces), not SS (Schutzstaffel). We were treated more humanely than we had been in other camps. My sister translated some English materials for the guards. In turn they gave her some raw potatoes, which helped us as we were starving all the time. Within a few days of our arrival we started working in the factory, which was located in the third barrack. I only managed to stay working with the group for a few days since the terrible pain in my back returned. That pain started in Nuremberg while I was working and spending a lot of time in the bunkers because we were being constantly bombed. Now the pain in my back persisted and became unbearable with each passing minute. Finally I went to the infirmary, where bed rest was suggested. I stayed there for most of the remaining time.

I remember when news of Roosevelt's death reached us. Our hope of the war ever ending and of ever being free was shattered. Most of us cried bitterly, but all of us were very sad.

One Saturday morning in early May, around 11:30, we were all in the barrack when some women, standing on the top bunk looking out the window, noticed men running down the mountainside. More and more men appeared. The women reported that they had guns in their hands. I remember our excitement and how we jumped up on the beds to see the men running toward the camp. They surrounded the camp and pushed the gate open. No German guards appeared anywhere; they were hiding in their rooms. It was reported that one of the officers was changing into civilian clothing when the White Russian partisans broke into his room and arrested him. Most of the Germans did not resist arrest. One officer tried to flee on a motorbike. He was shot on the spot right in front of us. Some cheered, but most of us were shocked to see such cruelty.

The partisans were ready to leave with their prisoners. They invited anyone who wanted to come to join them. They insisted that the rest of us stay in the camp behind locked gates and wait for the Americans to come and liberate us, which they said should happen in just a few days since they were very close by. About 120 women left with the partisans. It was a mixed group. Several hours later, the Jewish women came back to the camp. The White Russian partisans told them that Jewish women were not welcome in their group.

The women who returned to our camp told us the story of how our liberation came about, as the partisans had told them. Friday night a few female Wehrmacht officers went to a nearby bar for some drinks. They told the bartender that there was a plan to blow up the camp. Cans filled with gasoline were placed around the camp and they would be ignited the next day at 12:30 p.m. This information was transmitted to the nearest partisan group and they went into action. They came over from their hiding places and liberated us. The war ended two days later and the Americans liberated our camp.

## Life Changes

I was born in Mukachevo, Czechoslovakia. My family was a close and warm family. They took care of each other and lived intertwined lives. My uncle lived right next door to us with three cousins. My grandparents lived nearby and after my grandfather died, my grandmother came to live with us. Other family members, living in towns farther away, would come to visit once a month.

We were a well-respected family in Mukachevo and in the region. My family was an intellectual family, with several doctors and rabbis. Education was valued, as was kindness and caring for the community. My family ran a soup kitchen for people in need of extra food in the community.

One of the stories I recall is on Purim, people of the town would stop by my grandparents' house to put on a "Purim Spiel" (play). The feeling of life and vitality that was present in our lives has remained with me over the years, as has the terrible sadness that overcame us as we caught wind of the horrific things happening to our family and others around us. And even then, my family helped others. My parents took in two children whose parents feared for their lives. They thought the children would be safer with our family. Unfortunately, they were wrong.

In 1938, when Prague was annexed by Germany, Czechoslovakia was partitioned. Our section of the country was returned to Hungary. Horthy, the president of Hungary, supported Hitler's policies. Our lives changed completely. My family owned a wholesale liquor, wine, and beer manufacturing business, which was immediately confiscated by the government. A man from Budapest took over the management of the business, under my father and uncle's tutelage.

I was almost eight years old when the area in which we were living was annexed back to Hungary from Czechoslovakia.

In the morning my mother said, "I did not sleep all night, worrying about our future." My father was equally concerned. We children got ready to go to school. On the way we stopped to pick up my best friend. We always walked to school together. She told me that her mom had spent the entire night being happy about the future. We talked about this all the way to school and were totally confused.

Our wonderful school, the Hebrew Gymnasium, had changed. Girls and boys could no longer attend the same classes from fourth to eighth grades. There were many other changes as well.

In 1941 and 1942 news filtered back to us that some family members from Slovakia had been deported to Majdanek and killed. Our mother and all of the family went into mourning and so our lives changed once more. Some girls who managed to escape brought news of people in Poland being made to dig their own graves, lining up on the side and falling in as they were shot. For a while we housed many of the girls who had escaped. I do not know where they went after our house.

In March 1944, the Germans marched into Budapest and within a few weeks they had set up ghettos. We had to vacate our houses and move to these designated ghettos. We were lucky—we moved to my aunt's family compound, which happened to be on one of the streets designated for the ghetto.

Four or five weeks later we were marched to one of the brick factories in our city and loaded onto cattle cars. That was a horrific and life-changing day for many of us. Along with many other terrible things happening around us, one of our favorite teachers decided that she was not going to walk into the cattle car; she sat down on its steps instead. She was shot on the spot, with all of us watching. Most of the rest of us followed orders. The rumor was that we were being sent somewhere to work. We would be working in the fields. The sick and very old, including my own grandmother, were separated from all of us and herded onto the cattle cars. Three or four days later, we arrived in Auschwitz.

In reality, it was a lifetime later.

Arriving at the “ARBEIT MACHT FREI” sign in Auschwitz at the age of 14 at the end of May 1944, I remember being totally devoid of feelings. I remember being separated first from my father and then from my mother, my 12-and-a-half-year-old brother, and my two little adopted cousins, who were eight and ten years old.

Not having any idea of what was awaiting us, my older sister and I followed orders.

I do not remember anything about my head being shaved, showering, or taking my four brand-new dresses off to put on the striped clothing and wooden clogs. My first memory is of entering barrack #30 in the C Lager (camp) with my sister and the many people who we were to share our new home with.

Suddenly a woman approached my sister and they hugged and cried. This young woman, Miriam Leitner, was the Block Alteste (barrack director); she and my sister spent a summer together at camp in 1938 or 1939. She was taken from Slovakia, along with many other young women, to somewhere in Poland. From there they were taken to the German front, where they were put to work and also made to serve as “women” for the soldiers. She and some of the other women survived and were brought to Auschwitz, where they got some posh jobs, such as Block Alteste or Lager Elteste. She took us into her very little room and told us that our mother, brother, and little cousins had most probably already been murdered. We could not believe her—it was not possible to fathom. Then she gave us a few cubes of sugar. As I was sucking the sugar, I remember feeling the energy swimming through my bloodstream. I thought that was fascinating.

She made my sister her assistant—she was to keep the barrack clean and make sure that it was neat. Since I was only 14 years old, I qualified to be a Läuferin (messenger girl). She managed to arrange that job for me. Our job—I think there were eight or 12 of us messenger girls—was to stand at the gate of our camp where the German guards were housed in a booth and follow their orders to bring messages to everyone who needed to receive news or directives. This job most probably saved our lives in Auschwitz. For example, when I got sick with typhoid fever, the nurses in the infirmary always hid me when they knew that a selection would be taking place.

The Germans at the gate had lots of fun with us. Since we all spoke German, they spoke in very loud voices for us to hear about the atrocities that were going on, what and how people were being tortured and killed in the camps. They also kept cursing the Jews constantly.

I don’t remember much else, except standing outside early in the morning for cel appel (roll call) in the freezing nasty weather every day. I also remember feeling so sad each time someone was selected from our barrack and taken away. It always meant that we would never see them again, as they were taken to the crematorium.

One time my sister and I received a message from our father that he was going to be passing by on some road where we might be able to see each other. I have no idea how this came about. However, we did go to that road and we did manage to see him with scores of other men carrying blankets from one camp to another. It was great to know that some others in our family were still alive. For a while, we were very happy.

Another time we received another message. This one was from one of my uncles. He had just arrived from Terezin and was in the Lager next to ours. If we could, we should come to a certain spot by the electric fence at four in the afternoon. My sister and I did just that. The meeting was joyful and painful for all three of us. We met again several times after that. One day he told us that if on a day he did not show up, we should know that he had been taken to the gas chambers and murdered. Indeed, one day a female friend of his met us at the wires and told us that he sent us a message of lots of love and good-bye. That was an indescribable moment in my life.

Shortly after the attempted and failed uprising of the Sonderkommando, my sister and I were selected to be shipped out of Auschwitz. This was late in October 1944.





## Coincidences of Life

MARCEL DRIMER

*Born in Drobovycz, Poland, in 1934, Marcel Drimer survived the war first by hiding in secret bunkers in the town's ghetto, then in the home of a Ukrainian family.*

I was seven years old when the German army entered our town, Drohobycz, in Soviet Ukraine on July 1, 1941. Immediately they started persecuting Jews by indiscriminately robbing and killing us, forcing us to wear armbands with the Star of David, and confiscating our arms, radios, gold, etc. They encouraged Ukrainian thugs to enter Jewish homes, beat up the inhabitants, and take whatever they wanted. In fact, it did not take much encouragement. My maternal grandfather was one of the victims of the beatings and died a few days later.

In August 1942, in our small apartment lived nine people: my parents; my sister and I; Aunt Ryfka, my father's sister, and her two small children; my maternal grandmother, Sara; and my paternal grandfather, Isaac.

Ryfka's husband had been drafted into the Soviet army. Sara's husband was killed by the thugs in June 1941. None of these people could fend for themselves and fully depended on my father for food and shelter. The apartment was crowded and food was rationed and scarce. My father bartered items for food, including his wedding ring for a loaf of bread.

My Gentile nanny, Jancia, who loved me very much, would visit us from time to time and bring some bread and milk. She offered to take me with her for a few days to feed me and give me a bath and then bring me back home.

After a couple of days my sister, Irena, who missed me a great deal, cried and begged my mother to bring me back home so she could play with me. Mother took off her Star of David armband and walked with Irena to Jancia's place. When they came, they found me sitting in a corner crying and Jancia on the bed in labor. Mother helped her to deliver the baby, which turned out to be stillborn. We stayed there overnight. The next morning, Jancia's husband came from his nightshift and said that there was an aktion in town—Germans were killing and gathering Jews for deportation. He was very upset seeing us there and said that if the Nazis found us in his home they would kill all of us. He gave my mother, Irena, and me some food and told us to hide in the forest.

We started walking through a wheat field toward the forest. My mother noticed a hole in the ground and decided we should hide there. She wore a raincoat the color of ripe wheat. The three of us lay down and covered ourselves with the coat. There were other Jews hiding in the fields and the forests.

When the Germans found a group of Jews hiding, we heard shouts, the dogs were barking, and people were begging and praying for mercy. Children were crying. The Germans escorted the group out and there was silence. A deadly silence. After a while the Germans returned to find another group of Jews and the sounds repeated, like a leitmotif. We lay horrified, expecting to be next. My sister and I cried. Mother tried to keep us quiet and covered us with her body. This lasted for three or four hours. Then the horrific noise stopped. We waited until dusk and then Mother decided to walk back to Jancia's house. As we approached the road, a German soldier with a big dog came toward us. We were terrified. He looked at us for a few minutes, which seemed like hours. Then he turned around and walked away. To this day I don't know why, but perhaps he noticed my blond, blue-eyed pretty little sister.

After spending another night in Jancia's house, Father, who had stayed in a workers' dormitory overnight, came and took us home. Our place was empty and in terrible disarray. Feathers from torn bedding were



everywhere, the furniture was broken, and all the valuables were gone. A neighbor told us later that when the Germans and their helpers missed our place, a ten-year-old Ukrainian boy, whose name was Koziol, ran after them to show them where our relatives lived.\*

If Jancia hadn't taken me to her home, if my sister hadn't convinced Mother to go, and if the German soldier on the road had been accompanied by another soldier, I wouldn't be here to tell this story.

\*In that aktion about 600 Jews were killed and 2,500 taken to Belzec, including my relatives.

## The Diamond and the Cow

My uncle, Abraham Gruber (nicknamed "Bumek"), was called up for active duty in the Polish army in the summer of 1939. He was a corporal in the cavalry. He was a strong, handsome, and very likable man. I remember him telling me that he could jump over two horses side by side. The Polish cavalry was well known in the world; they fought bravely, but it turned out they were no match for German tanks. At some point the officers realized that the war was lost and disbanded the units. Bumek walked some 250 miles from near Warsaw to our hometown of Drohobycz pretending to be Polish or Ukrainian. He knew how to talk and pray in these languages, worked for food and shelter along the way, and made it home to his wife, Blimka, and daughter, Liba. Drohobycz at that time was under Soviet rule.

In June 1941, Germany attacked Russia and their army reached Drohobycz on the first of July.

Summer of 1943 found Bumek, his wife, and his daughter living in the ghetto. It was an open ghetto; it did not have fences, but Jews were not allowed to leave it. When conditions there became unbearable, Bumek brought his wife and daughter to the Galicja oil refinery, where he worked as a butcher and lived in the labor camp with other Jewish families. At the same time my mother, sister, and I were hiding in the nearby village of Mlynki Szkolnikowe, at the Sawinski farm. Food was rationed, and buying it on the black market would seem suspicious to the neighbors. We all would be in danger of being discovered and killed. Therefore the Sawinski's youngest son, 12-year-old Tadek, took a wagon and a big milk container every day to the eating place where workers had their meals and he brought the table scraps home for the pigs. We got the first choice. Sometimes Bumek secretly gave Tadek some meat or bread to bring to all of us. This was very dangerous for everyone.

One day, when Bumek was at work, someone told him that his wife and daughter had been taken away in a truck, with other people, and driven toward the forest. Since Bumek had befriended some German officers by giving them better cuts of meat and talking with them in German, one of them took him on a motorcycle to try to catch up with the truck to rescue his family. They were too late. As they approached the forest, the truck was on its way back. The officer stopped it, but there was only the clothing of the dead left on the floor of the truck.

Bumek looked inside the truck and found the shoes of his little girl. He was devastated. He lost his will to live. He decided he would not hide if there was another aktion.

A few weeks later, while walking in the camp compound, he noticed a young girl with curly hair and Semitic features who was playing there. She took him to her mother, Tusia. Bumek warned her to hide the child and they talked about their misfortunes. Her husband was mobilized by the Soviet army and taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans. Since Germans immediately killed the Jewish POWs, she assumed he was dead.

Loneliness in their situation was especially depressing so Bumek and Tusia began to see each other. He helped Tusia and her daughter, Fela, by giving them food and companionship. Tusia was a seamstress for the German officers' wives and mistresses. When one of them asked Tusia to finish a dress by a certain day, it was a signal

for Bumek and Tusia that another aktion was coming soon and their lives would be endangered again. When Bumek and his family were living in the ghetto, the Germans had dropped a looted chandelier during one of the aktions. Bumek had picked up a few pieces of crystal and asked a jeweler to make him a ring with a crystal cut like a diamond. Now he offered this ring to the Sawinskis as a payment for hiding him. Mr. Sawinski was going to sell the ring to buy a cow. Because the ring was a fake, Bumek could not let that happen so he pretended it had sentimental value to him and promised to buy the Sawinskis a cow after the war.

The Sawinski family had known Bumek since he was a child, liked him very much, and agreed to hide him. Bumek hired a trusted farmer with a horse and wagon filled with straw, hid Tusia and Fela in it, and drove to the Sawinski farm. The Sawinskis were not prepared to take in all of them, but Bumek said that he could not take Tusia and Fela back to face certain death and so the Sawinskis agreed to let all three of them stay. I don't remember the details, but eventually there were 13 of us hiding there. The conditions were terrible; some of us were hiding in the attic under a thatched roof with no chimney, others in a hole under the dirt floor. Food was scarce. It was fall 1943; we heard the Russian front was not far and hoped that our misery would soon be over. But it took until August 7, 1944 for the Red Army to liberate us.

There were about 13,000 Jews in Drohobycz before the war; in August 1944, about 400 survivors came out of the forests and other hiding places. We were malnourished, sick, and dressed in rags. Slowly, we tried to restart our lives. Some Jews returned from Russia, some were demobilized, and some came back from the camps. One of them was Tusia's husband. He had been taken as a prisoner of war by an Italian unit fighting on the Eastern front. The Italians treated their POWs humanely.

By that time Tusia and Bumek were married and she was pregnant with Bumek's child. Tusia and her first husband, Giedalko, were Zionists and had gone to Palestine but came back before the war. Their daughter, Fela, was born in 1937. Tusia now had to make a wrenching decision and she decided to stay with Bumek.

With the first money Bumek saved, he bought a beautiful cow for the Sawinskis and asked them to return the ring. They never knew the ring was a fake. He also helped one of their sons get a job in the meat-processing company where he was a director. Bumek and my parents helped the Sawinskis as much as they could. We nominated them and they are now listed in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as Righteous Among the Nations.

I don't know much about the other people who survived with us. Their family name was Wajs. Mrs. Wajs was killed soon after liberation by a stray bullet from a drunken Russian soldier. The Sawinskis tried to contact them, but with no success.

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## Coming to the United States

ERIKA ECKSTUT

*Erika Eckstut (Neuman), from Znojmo, Czechoslovakia, survived the war posing as a Christian with false identification papers.*

On April 16, 1957, my husband, Robert Kauder, passed away. He would have turned 37 on May 27, his next birthday. I lived in Prague had two children at that time—my daughter was ten and my son was five. Every day, after my husband passed away, I went for a walk and left my children with “Babinka” (grandma), who stayed with me. She was like a mother to me although she was not technically family. I did this for about a month. One day she told me that when I returned, the children would be in an orphanage. I hesitated for a moment and then left. Then I started to think about how she was not my mother, she was really a stranger to me and my children, and I could not believe that she would do this to me.

When I returned from my walk I went to my children’s room and my daughter was still awake. We hugged and cried and then my daughter said, “Maminka, you came back.” We both cried and cried. That evening I did not speak to Babinka at all.

In the morning the doctor came to the house and he gave me a long talk, asking me why I would not talk to Babinka. He said that he would put me away in a psychiatric ward because for the last month I would not speak to anybody. Babinka said that she would try her own home remedy. The doctor agreed to this as Babinka would not let me go to the psychiatric ward. But it did not work out the way she thought so she called for help.

I felt very bad when I realized what really was going on and I excused myself to Babinka for my behavior. I was in such deep mourning at that time that I gave no thought to what I was doing to my children and to Babinka. Then when Babinka and I talked we loved each other even more than before.

After that, I received a letter from my mother and sister, who were living in New York at the time, and they asked me to please come and live with them. I went and applied to come to the United States and a few weeks later I got a call to come and talk to the government official. When I got there the guy who was in charge asked me why I wanted to go to the United States and I told him that I did not have anybody in Prague and I would like to go see my family and be with them. He said, “What did you lose, just a man? You are a young woman and you can find another one.”

I got very angry and I told him that if my husband had not fought in the army, he would not be sitting here being rude to me. From there I went to the castle to see the president of Czechoslovakia and when I got there, I had my little son with me and there were two soldiers with bayonets up and they crossed them so I said I was going to leave my son with them and if one hair would be crooked on his head I was going to cut both of their heads off. I went through the bayonets and as soon as I took a step there was a man and he asked me what I was doing. I said I was coming to see the president and he asked me if I had an appointment. I told him I thought the president was for the people and I am one of the people.

He said to come with him and when he opened the door I saw the president leave and I spoke to him and he said the secretary is very capable. The secretary asked me what was the problem and I complained about the other government official. She said that there is no problem in sending me to the United States but the children of a Czech officer cannot go to a capitalistic country and be beggars on Broadway. I told her that I would like to see my mother but I would never, never leave my children behind. That was the end of my interview with the secretary, and I went home and was very scared about what was going to happen to me because we were under a communist regime.

Early in 1960, I received a letter from the minister and he said that if I wanted to go to the United States I would have to give up my pension, my citizenship, and my house. I waited two weeks and went to see General Svoboda (my husband had been his adjutant) and he said he understood my fear. Then he told me I should not let my children go to school and he would come and stay with them until I got back from court. He told me that he would guarantee that I would see the children again.

So I went to court and I was told that I would also have to go to court to give up the children's citizenship. I listened to everything and then left. Then I got a letter for my court case and went with a lawyer friend. They took my citizenship, pension, and house away and then I had to go for the children. When I had to give away their citizenship, a woman got up and said that she was appointed guardian of the children by the courts. I jumped up and told her I had never seen her. I asked her if she knew that the children had been very sick, and the friend who came with me tried to tell me to keep quiet and finally told me to shut up. Then people came to my house to take inventory to tell me what I could and could not take with me and I still have the papers to show.

I came to the United States with my children on April 11, 1960, and I said "God bless America" in Czech as I did not speak English.

## My Grandfather

I was very fortunate to have had a happy childhood. The memories of my childhood kept me going during the terrible war. My childhood was just beautiful. I received a great deal of love and caring from both my parents and my grandparents.

When we first moved from Czechoslovakia to Romania, close to my grandparents, I was almost two years old. My sister was nearly seven years old. My grandparents did not have any other grandchildren in Europe. My sister was a real little lady, perfect in looks and behavior. I, on the other hand, was very lively and my behavior left a lot to be desired. Our grandparents loved us with all their hearts. I loved them both very much. We became friends from the first moment I came to their house. My grandfather would take me to see his horse, his cow, and his chickens every day. My sister did not like to visit the animals but I loved seeing them.

When I would go out with my grandfather to feed the animals I was always nice and clean and my clothes were neatly pressed, but by the time we returned home I was a big mess. My grandmother was always very upset with my grandfather because of the way I looked. As a result my grandfather gave me a red shirt and pair of pants to wear when I went with him. However, he was unable to provide me with shoes, so then my grandmother complained about my dirty shoes.

We were all very happy in Romania. The reason we had moved from Czechoslovakia to Romania was that my father wanted to take his parents with us to Palestine because Hitler had come to power. When my father spoke to his father about leaving, his father, my grandfather, said that if he could take his horse, his cow, and his chickens he would gladly go to Palestine but he would not leave without them. My grandparents had a little farm there in Romania and they would work the whole day on it.

As soon as I was old enough my grandfather bought me a pony to ride. We had great times with my grandparents on their little farm; there was always something going on. I could go on and on and spend a whole hour talking about everything I could have done. I loved the Passover time. My grandmother would change the dishes at Passover. The whole house was scrubbed and it looked like new. My grandfather would sit in a white kittel. My grandparents were very religious. I would ask the four questions at the seder. The seder was a big event in our family. When I had a problem finding the afikomen, my grandfather, who had the most beautiful blue eyes, would wink at me in order to show me where it was.

At home our parents were quite strict and the only shadow in my childhood was that we had to read a great deal. My father was very strict about our studies. I did not like having to study. My sister, on the other hand, always had her nose in a book. After I would finish a book, my father would sit me down and ask me what the moral of the story was. I did not like to tell the moral of the story because it took me an hour to figure it out. In this hour I could have had lots of fun. I could have climbed trees or played with my grandfather.

My childhood memories were all happy ones. The good memories are the ones that kept me going when times got so bad. We had plenty of bad times when we were in the ghetto and our grandparents wouldn't eat anything because it was not kosher. They were strictly kosher and if they did not believe the scarce food we had to eat was kosher, they did not eat.

One day I was sitting with my grandfather and talking and he asked me to go and bring my father into the room to him. I found my father and sent him to see my grandfather. When my father came back he told us that Grandfather had just died. I couldn't believe it. I had just been sitting and talking with him. My father buried him in the Jewish cemetery in Czernowitz. That was a terrible time for me to lose my grandfather. He was so close to me. It was terrible for me. My father tried to console me by saying that my grandfather had died a natural death and was not murdered by Nazis. I was still so very unhappy when my grandfather died.

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## Deceptive Expectations

MANYA FRIEDMAN

*Manya Friedman (Moszkowicz), from Chmielnik, Poland, survived the Gogolin transit camp; Gleiwitz, Ravensbrück, and Rechlin concentration camps; and a death march.*

For decades we survivors have been waiting for the release of the millions of records kept in Germany by the International Tracing Service (ITS). The Nazis were meticulous in keeping records of the countries they occupied and of the people whose fates they determined. They kept strict records of every person and event, of dates, and of the destinations of the people involved. We were anxious to get access to those documents to learn about the final fates of our lost dear ones.

After the Allied forces liberated the camps, the records from the camps were collected and deposited for safekeeping in a small, quiet town: Bad Arolsen, in Germany. The place was chosen as safe because it was not destroyed by the bombings during liberation. After the war, even the records of people in the displaced persons camps were added to the collection. After some years, the International Committee of Management of Bad Arolsen was taken over by the International Committee of the Red Cross and controlled by a governing board of 11 nations.

While I was in Sweden, after being liberated by the Swedish Red Cross, I started writing to the International Red Cross inquiring about my parents and two younger brothers. At first I inquired about the entire family as a unit. Then I thought it would be better if I inquired about each person individually, in case they had been separated. Both times waiting for a reply was agonizing. A typical family request took years of frustrated efforts to get a reply. The reply I finally received was: "There is no record." I was still holding on to an illusion that maybe the International Red Cross did not search well enough.

After half a century passed I gave up hope of ever finding any answers. Several years ago a staff member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum—after having been urged by survivors to have those records released during their lifetime—became determined to get involved to solve this problem. It was an uphill battle. At every step he encountered opposition. Every request was refused, every proposition rejected. For seven difficult years the Museum fought to get those archives opened. Finally, after years of perseverance some of the records were released, though not all of the 11 countries have yet agreed to release the records.

In the meantime many of the survivors have already passed away, never knowing what happened to their families. Some survivors finally learned the fates of their families, and one of them is among our group. His parents sent him away on a Kindertransport to save his life, and he had no contact with them after that. Through the records he learned what happened to them. Though the outcome is sad, now he has some record of what happened to them.

Occasionally there was a heartwarming story related by another staff member working in the Museum's Survivors Registry. After hard work and determination, he managed to unite two childhood sweethearts after 64 years of separation. Neither one knew that the other had survived. They had met in a concentration camp but were later sent to separate camps. When the war ended, one found relatives in Australia and the other in Canada. Now, through the archives in Germany and the help of the Museum, they have found each other. They are both too old to travel, but have renewed their friendship by phone.

As for me, I was not expecting a miracle. I did get my own file with the dates and concentration camps where I spent my teenage years. But this I very well remembered. I hoped at least to get a date when my entire family was murdered so I would know when to say Kaddish and light a candle in their memory. However, of the transports that went directly to the gas chambers, there are no records.

## Through a Wire Fence

The news that something had happened at the packing station during my cousin's shift made me rush to her barrack to find out if she was well. Though we were in the same camp, we seldom met each other because we worked on different shifts and were assigned to different barracks. Sometimes when I saw her returning from work, I did not recognize her because her face was a black mask. We worked in a factory that produced soot (carbon).

The Germans were in desperate need of that product, which they used to make synthetic rubber for the production of tires for the military. The production was divided into three departments. Although each department had detrimental effects, the packing station was the worst.

In the first department the oil used in the production of the soot had to be heated to a certain degree to produce fumes for the burners in the next department. The girls working there had to inhale the noxious fumes. The second department's job was to clean the burners to produce larger flames for the production of the soot. The temperature there was unbearable. And in the third department—the packing station—the soot coming in through the pipes had to be packed into bags. The dust settled on the girls' perspiring bodies, and when they wiped their brows a black mask was created.

Before I managed to reach my cousin's barrack that day, something caught my eye.

Across from our barracks was a wire fence separating us from the men's camp. While rushing to my cousin's barrack I noticed a man sitting on the ground wrapped in a blanket. As I was about to pass him I hesitated for a moment. His face seemed familiar. He had been our neighbor back home, from one of the families evicted from Germany shortly before the war. He and his wife and daughter arrived in our city with only their luggage. The Jewish Committee rented a place for them in a neighboring building, and some people donated furniture. My father and several other neighbors helped them settle in. Their daughter later dated our neighbors' son—that was how we became acquainted.

I asked him how he was, but in my mind I already imagined what his future would be. The men in our camp were working on construction. It was a brand-new camp and only partially finished. Their lot was even worse than ours. They had to carry heavy loads, which their emaciated bodies often rejected. And if they dropped a load they got a beating. It was an outdoor job, in the summer heat and in the winter cold, wearing only the striped garments.

Every few weeks a new group of men was brought in to work, and at the same time the sick and those unable to work were loaded on the same truck and taken away. If we were in camp when this took place, we sadly watched them leave, knowing what their future would be. As I was talking to our neighbor while thinking about his lot, someone from the back approached and slammed my face against the fence. It was our German Lager Fuhrerin (camp leader). We were not allowed to speak to the men.

I continued to my cousin's barrack and was glad to learn that she was not hurt. She in turn became concerned about my face.

For several days I had on the left side of my face the design from the fence. It did not hurt me nearly as much as the thought of our neighbor's fate.

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## Mama Picking My Husband, Jack

NESSE GODIN

*Nesse Godin (Galperin), from Siauliai, Lithuania, endured a concentration camp, four labor camps, and a death march. She spent five years in a displaced persons camp in Feldafing, Germany, before immigrating to the United States.*

In January 1945, we were lined up for roll call, expecting to go to work as usual. Instead we were ordered to get our blankets and our dish for food and to come back. As we stood there lined up five in a row, we were told that we were leaving the camp. We assumed that we would be going to another labor camp, but instead we started off on foot. Later this would be known as a “death march.” We marched through the towns and villages of Poland and Germany, leaving many women behind, some who died from exhaustion and starvation and some who were shot to death. We marched this way until the middle of February. We stopped then outside of a little town called Chinoff, where we were pushed into a barn. How many women were there I do not know. Many women died of typhus and hunger in that barn.

On March 10, the Soviet army found us. The Soviets set up a hospital in a school gymnasium in the nearby little town. After being there for six weeks, we were told that we could leave. We had to line up and be registered and then a document was given to each person. Since I was just 17 and therefore a minor, I was assigned a foster mother. My foster mother, a young woman from Poland, had left a little boy for safekeeping with Christian people near the city of Lodz. It took us weeks to get there.

When we came to Lodz we were taken to a shelter that was set up by some charitable organizations—the Red Cross, Jewish Relief Services, and the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. All around the room of a large dining area, there were posters with names of countries and cities. Everyone would sign where they were from so that people could find one another. A lady from my hometown told me that my mom was alive and eventually my mother and I were reunited in Lodz.

After a month or so men started to come back to Lodz. They came back from the camps, from hiding, and from fighting with the partisans. Some families were reunited, and life for the small families that had a man became easier. The men could go to the farms and get some food and these families did not need to come to the shelters.

One day Mama said to me that two women alone could not survive and that one of us would have to get married. I wondered why Mama would want to get married when she had me, but Mama told me that she would never get married again. She said that I would have to get married. I remember asking Mama how I would do that. How was I going to find a husband? She told me not to worry, that she would find one for me. There were some men in the shelter and she said she would ask them and maybe she could find a husband for me.

I looked around the room to where the men were sitting and I asked Mama which man she would ask. She told me that there was a man that had been in hiding and that he had lots of money. I rejected him because he was about 30 years older than me. Then she offered his brother, and him I did not like but I don’t remember why. The third choice was a man called Yankel.

I looked at him and I thought that he was cute and so I said, “Okay.” Mama walked over and told him that we were two women alone and since he had no family would he marry me? He looked over across the room to where I was standing and said he would. Mama brought him over to where I was standing. He took my hand and asked me if I would marry him. I looked at Mama, who was nodding her head, and I said I would.

I have been married to my dear husband for 65 years. We have three children, seven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

## The Kindnesses

In June 1941, the Germans occupied Lithuania within three days. Siauliai, the town where we lived, was taken over on the third day. We had heard what had happened to the Jews in Kaunas and in other cities. My brother Jecheskel was a student at the university in Kaunas and he had told my parents that the Nazis and their collaborators were looting Jewish homes. Jecheskel suggested that my parents try to ask some of their Lithuanian friends to hold some of our valuable things for safekeeping. My parents asked a few friends and some agreed to help us.

A doctor and his wife, a midwife, who were my parents' close friends, were the first to respond. Mama quickly took them our jewelry and a few other valuables. Some of our other valuables, like leather and fur coats and new shirts and dresses, were divided among other people. Among the people who held items for my family was a young man named Kaziukas, who was a doorman in a hotel; Jozas, a nephew of our live-in housekeeper; and Zenia, the lady who came every month to do our laundry. Our housekeeper, Ana, who was our nanny and lived with my family for 14 years, was upset that we did not leave everything with her. She wondered why my parents would trust all those strangers. I remember Mama telling her that we did not know what would happen and that it was not a good idea to put all of our eggs in one basket.

It was not too long after this that the ghetto was formed and the SS and Gestapo came to every Jewish home to assign us places in the ghetto. When they came to our apartment the first thing they did was to gather my family in the kitchen. There one of the SS helpers, a young girl about 17 years old who had taken German in school, was assigned to fill out certificates that assigned persons to a place in the ghetto. The Nazis told her to fill out certificates for my parents and my brothers but not for me. While the Nazis were looking for things they could take from the other rooms, my mother begged the girl to write a certificate for me. She gave her money. The girl did not say anything, but as soon as this commission left our apartment, my parents counted the certificates and found that there were two for my parents, two for my brothers, and one extra blank one that my parents could fill out for me. The girl was smart; she must have figured that if the Nazis checked, she could say that it had gotten stuck to the other certificates.

It is because of this girl's decision and her kindness that I was able to get into the ghetto. The people that did not have that certificate were killed in a forest called Zagare. Thirty-five hundred human beings from our town were killed there.

When we were pushed into the ghetto, life was terrible. There was only hunger and fear; the food that was given was so little. There were many Selektions in which people were taken away to be killed. Jewish workers who worked with Lithuanians started to exchange their clothing for bread. Since my parents had some valuable items hidden with their friends, they tried to get word to someone who could help us. My parents somehow found out that our housekeeper had packed up everything that we had left in the apartment and had moved to a farm where her brother lived. The doctor and his wife had left town, no one knew for where.

The only people who helped us were Kaziukas, Jozas, and Zenia. They exchanged the merchandise we'd left with them for food and somehow got it to us. Sometimes my brothers snuck into Zenia's house and brought food into the ghetto. Sometimes Zenia just tossed it over the fence to us. It was their kindness that helped us survive the ghetto. May their souls be blessed in heaven.

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## Light

LOUISE LAWRENCE-ISRAËLS

*Louise Lawrence-Israëls was born in Haarlem, Netherlands, and survived the war by hiding on the fourth floor of a rowhouse in Amsterdam.*

Light is important in my life. We only have a dormer window, too high for a little girl to look outside. We get up in the morning when a strip of light shines through that window, and when the window looks black, Mama quickly closes the blackout curtain and that is the time I love, watching Mama.

Mama is so careful with the candles; she makes new tall candles from tiny leftover candle stumps. I can see her hands as she carefully places a candle on top of the flame, holding it until the wax melts on the bottom and glues onto the leftover candle. This process fascinates me. The candle makes the room festive and warm.

At the end of every afternoon, I cannot wait until it gets dark. Since I am little I do not realize that the electricity does not work anymore and that the candles are our only source of light at the end of a day.

Mama has an old shoebox full of candle stumps. Every night she pulls the box out of the cupboard, and I wonder what she is going to do this time. We all stare into the flame and I hope that Mama will let me stay up for a little while longer.

How strange it is to see now that you can flip a switch to get light in your room. We miss the candles, but Mama keeps her box with leftovers carefully in a safe place. On stormy nights when the electric lamps flicker, we will have candlelight again.

I love the holiday Hanukkah, especially on the eighth day when we light eight candles, and the shammas\*: nine flames—what a wealth.

Even today I have a shoebox in our cupboard, full of candle stumps. You never know when you will need light.

\* The shammas, or helper candle, is used to light the other eight Hanukkah candles.

## Trust

May 5, 1945—the war in Holland is over. My parents and Selma, our friend, are so happy. My brother and I understand that the atmosphere in our attic is changing, but we do not understand the exact reason for the smiles on the faces of the three adults. My dad is running to the cupboard to get our last tin of cookies. Those cookies have helped us during the hungry winter, when we did not have much to eat. Dad opens the tin and puts it on the floor, and he tells us we can eat as many cookies as we like. That is fun. With a cookie in each hand we do not know where to start. After one cookie we are not hungry anymore and we put the other cookies back for next time. This must be the meaning of peace, eating cookies—we think.

It is about two days later and my mom says we are going outside. First, we have to go down four steep flights of stairs. It feels strange since I have never done it before. Then we arrive outside and there is the park. We have been living across from this park for three years. I am holding my brother's hand very tightly; I am really scared. Where are the walls? Everything is open. My parents say, "Play, children, and breathe in the fresh air." I am looking at my brother and I think I do not want this peace. I want to go home. I start crying. My brother must be thinking the same thing and he also starts crying. My parents are sad, but they take us back home. We forget our visit to the park and are happy again.

About two days later we are told that we will be going outside for a walk. There are so many people on the street, nobody is looking at us, but we still do not feel happy and are holding on to one another. We are used to the company of three adults. Who are all these people? Our parents talk to us and tell us that we are doing well and that we will be going out every day. Again we are happy to be home. Do we have to go out? All those people we do not know, they do not say a word to us.

About a week later, during our daily walk, we see other people. We see young men in uniform and they are smiling at us. They also talk to us, but we do not know what they are saying. They use words we have never heard before. They make us feel good, they are so friendly. We are still holding on to each other, but we smile back. Then these men in uniform reach into their pockets; their hands come out with Hershey bars, and they give one to each of us. We look at our mom—can we accept this? Mom nods her head and we try our first piece of chocolate. It tastes so good.

Our parents do not have trouble taking us outside after this. The friendly smiles and words, which we do not understand, make us trust people for the first time.

Note: The Canadian army liberated Amsterdam. I have never forgotten the friendliness of those soldiers and have always had a special place in my heart for them. I met one of our liberators a few months ago and was finally able to thank him for liberating us and the soldiers for letting a little girl trust people with their smiles.

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## Liberation Day

HARRY MARKOWICZ

*Born in Berlin in 1937, Harry Markowicz survived the majority of the war in hiding with a Belgian family until the liberation of Brussels in September 1944.*

Four years go by before I see another British soldier. The last one had been near the French-Belgian border when the British Expeditionary Force was being evacuated from the nearby beaches at Dunkirk. Again I'm with my mother. Before leaving the apartment she has told me that the Germans have run away but I don't understand where we are going and why my father is not coming with us. She tries to explain to me it has been two years since he has been outside and he is not ready to face people. Along the way, many people are rushing in the same direction. My mother too is in a hurry but we pass a burning tank and I stop to look at it. No one else pays any attention but I'm fascinated by the flames rising from the turret. My mother pulls me away and we merge with the people who are passing by us. We arrive in a park where we join a large crowd of cheering people.

I look around me uncomprehendingly but I sense that my world has changed. I'm vaguely aware of a column of tanks stopped in the lanes of the park with soldiers and many cheerful and smiling civilians milling around them. My mother leads me toward a British soldier standing high up on a tank and looking down at us. We don't share a language so the communication is nonverbal. My mother picks me up and hands me into the soldier's extended arms, which are reaching down for me. The soldier lifts me up easily and holds me in his arms with his friendly smiling face close to mine. I look down at my mother and she tells me to give him a kiss. I kiss him on the cheek and then look down at her again. Tears are streaming down her cheeks and I become alarmed. Unlike me, the soldier seems to understand her reaction; he continues to smile. Through her tears my mother tries to reassure me that she is all right. She tells me that they are tears of happiness, something I have not experienced before in my seven years, and it leaves me confused.

## Revisiting Memories

Early in 1942, when I wasn't quite five years old, a German officer accompanied by two soldiers came to our apartment in Brussels. I remember being in the room that faced the street with my mother and the officer. The two soldiers were elsewhere in the apartment. The officer was searching through an armoire, possibly for foreign currency or other valuables, when the doorbell rang.

As usual when I heard the doorbell, I ran to the window to see who was there. I hadn't reached the window yet when the officer bellowed at me. Scared, not knowing why he had yelled at me, I stopped and turned around toward him. At that moment, he threw at me a pair of rolled-up socks that he had found in the armoire. The socks missed me but I was so frightened by his behavior I started to cry. He then shouted at me, "Wenn ein Offizier vom Dritten Reich ein Befehl gibt must mann gehorchen." ("When an officer of the Third Reich gives an order, you must obey.")

Reacting like a mother bear defending her cub, my mother looked up at him and retorted in fluent German, "Is that any way for an officer of the Third Reich to comport himself with a child?" The officer then quietly told me to leave the room, but I grabbed my mother's skirt and held onto it. There was a long silence before he returned to his search of the armoire. I don't remember what happened after that.

In recent years, on several occasions I have asked my brother, Manfred, to validate some of my memories as well as to clarify my understanding of these long-ago events. In a sense, Mani (his nickname) is my memory since he is older by several years and he and I are the only ones still alive in our immediate family. I asked

him once whether he remembered the time my mother talked back to a German officer in our apartment. I was disappointed when he said, "I wasn't home so how could I remember it?" But then he added, "I was the one who rang the doorbell." Excited by this revelation, I wanted to know what he knew about this incident.

For the first time, I heard Mani's side of the story. He had been out on a business errand with our father. "We were walking home and when we turned the corner we saw a car parked on our very short two-block-long street. Cars were rare because the Germans had confiscated all private cars. Although the car was parked some distance from our house, Papa had a premonition that something was not right. He said to me, 'Go on home and if all is well, come and get me.'" The thinking at the time was that women and children had nothing to fear from the German occupier.

Mani continued, "I was a bit puzzled but without questioning I did as he told me. When I got to the house we lived in, I rang the doorbell [we did not carry house keys] and was only slightly surprised when a German soldier opened the door for me. Entering the apartment I realized that the Gestapo—the German secret police—was doing a search. I knew about these things since I helped Papa trade in foreign currencies and had heard about the Gestapo conducting searches in people's apartments."

My brother continued, "We waited in fear that the Gestapo might find something, but fortunately they did not and left. Had Papa been home they would probably have taken him to their headquarters for further interrogation, which was usually done in a very violent manner."

For nearly half a century following the end of the war my family never spoke about how we experienced living under the Nazi regime in Germany and later under Nazi occupation in Belgium. By the time Mani and I began to speak about it, our parents and our sister had passed away so it was too late to fill in the gaps in our collective memory.

For the first 40 years after the war ended, we didn't think of ourselves as survivors since we were not deported to the concentration camps. Despite our years in hiding and our fears of being caught, we thought there really was nothing to talk about.

© 2011 by Harry Markowicz



## The Happiest Day in My Life

HALINA YASHAROFF PEABODY

*Halina (Litman) Yasbaroff Peabody, born in Krakow, Poland, survived the war with her mother and sister by posing as Catholics using false papers bought from a priest.*

Luckily, I have had more than one happy day in my life. One such day was when I visited Israel for the first time. I was excited and apprehensive about the trip because I knew so little about Israel. I wondered what the country looked like and how it would make me feel.

At the time of my first visit to Israel, I lived in England. I had lived through the Holocaust in Poland and through the horrendous times of World War II. Moving to England had not been easy for me. At the time, I did not speak English nor know any British customs, which were so different from what I was used to. What helped me adjust to life in England was joining Maccabi Youth Club and playing table tennis. Eventually I became quite good at table tennis and when the 1953 Maccabiah Games came around I was chosen to be part of the team representing England and I earned my trip to Israel. These games take place every four years like the Olympics, except that the Maccabiah are for Jewish athletes from all over the world.

The trip to Israel took seven days by train and sea, and I had a chance to get to know athletes from other countries who were traveling on the same ship. I soon discovered that many of the participants were of Polish origin and had settled in different countries after the war. Most of the Polish athletes were Holocaust survivors like me, so we had a lot in common and we spent the whole voyage exchanging stories.

On the last leg of the voyage, as we approached Israel, I stood on the ship all night to catch my first glimpse of Haifa. I knew that Haifa was built on a mountain and when the first glittering lights began to come into view, it looked like Naples all lit up. By the time we docked in Haifa, it was morning and the sun was shining brightly.

Sylvia, my childhood friend, met me at the port. She had settled in Israel after the war, but our families had known each other well before the war and her family used to visit us every summer. My mother told me that Sylvia, who was a few years older than me, threw me out of my pram once, and we used to joke about that. She drove us from the dockside up to the Hadar, a neighborhood in the middle of Haifa hillside, and then to the Carmel, which is at the top of the city. As we continued upward, I observed the surroundings with great curiosity. I noticed that as we climbed, the buildings ranged from typical stone structures to more modern apartment houses. There were a lot of small shops and kiosks that sold drinks and watermelon. As the road wound around the mountain, the view of the town and bay below became more and more beautiful. The brightly shining sun enhanced the view, a wonderful antidote to the gloomy English weather I had left behind.

I was overwhelmed by a feeling of coming home. I couldn't understand how this was possible on my first day in a strange country, one with a different language, and yet that is how it felt to me.

I wondered if it was because everyone was Jewish and here in Israel I wasn't a foreigner anymore. In England I was made to feel like a refugee. The English accepted us and gave us citizenship, but they never really made us feel at home. Here, I suddenly felt that this country was mine even if I didn't know it yet. My "Jewishness" became a source of pride rather than a source of embarrassment. When we arrived at my friend's apartment, we were welcomed warmly by her two grandmothers. The two of them cooked us a marvelous meal and we sat and ate on the balcony, which surrounded the apartment. As I was looking down on Haifa Bay, I remember that I turned to my friend and said, "What? We only have three ships?" I



meant the Israeli navy, but I had referred to it as belonging to me also. When I realized what I had just said “we,” I realized it meant that I belonged here.

My experience in Israel continued wonderfully for the whole two months I was there. I didn’t win a gold medal but I did win a bronze in singles and a silver medal in mixed and ladies’ doubles in the Maccabiah Games.

After the Games were over, I got to know my three cousins and my aunt and uncle who had immigrated to Israel in the 1930s. Everybody I met there seemed to become my friend, and everybody seemed to want to do something for me. When I traveled by bus alone in town, I would have the destination written on a piece of paper in Hebrew to show the driver so he could tell me when to get off. The whole bus would get involved and make sure to let me know. Everybody also had a “boy” for me, one who owned a refrigerator yet! In the early 1950s a refrigerator was a sign of wealth in Israel.

I was having such a good time that I really didn’t want to return to England. But I knew that my mother was looking forward to my return. After all we had been through together during the war, I knew I had to return home, but I never stopped thinking and dreaming about going back to Israel. Sadly, my mother succumbed to cancer and passed away in 1956. And then I got another chance to represent England in the 1957 Maccabiah. I planned to stay in Israel for one year, but it turned out to be a happy 11 years.

I consider the first day I arrived in Israel to be one of the happiest days of my life and also one of the most pivotal.

© 2011 by Halina (Litman) Yasharoff Peabody



## Don't Ask for Soap

CHARLENE SCHIFF

*Charlene Schiff (Shulamit Perlmutter), from Horochow, Poland, survived the Holocaust by hiding alone in the forests near her home.*

It was a gloomy winter morning in the ghetto. The loudspeaker was sending information of interest to us. "Today we need children for light work. Congregate in the market square. A Selektion will take place in half an hour."

Mama was always uneasy about my volunteering whenever such announcements occurred. She knew that sometimes workers reported for duty and were never seen again. The few times I was lucky to be selected I returned home safe, with extra food.

The work was usually indoors, in warm rooms, and the workers in the kitchens, who were not Germans, were quite generous in rewarding us with food to take home. Mama reluctantly gave me her permission to go to the market square.

Eight of us were selected. We were marched to the administration section of town. I was assigned to scrub office floors, peel lots of potatoes, and polish about 30 pairs of men's boots. I was in a building that I believe had been a hospital before the war. Being indoors in a warm place and knowing there would be food to take home made the work almost pleasant.

At the end of a full day, all eight of the children met in a large room adjoining the huge kitchen. Cooks, their helpers, and assorted workers kept the place very busy. I asked one of the workers for some soap in order to wash my hands, which were covered in shoe polish and dirt. Several Germans had just walked in and one of them overheard my request and became enraged. "Soap, she wants soap, I'll show her... Come with me," he barked. He ushered me into a small room with several gurneys and ordered me to climb up on one of them and lie face down.

It was quiet for a few seconds. He pulled my dress up and then I felt as if sharp knives were cutting my backside and I was on fire. The merciless beating continued. I tried to keep from screaming and bit my lip until my mouth was full of blood. This was the end of my life, I thought.

I don't know how long this went on. The next thing I remember, my friends were trying to get me off the gurney. My panties were in shreds and I was bloody all over. They practically carried me back to the ghetto as the excruciating pain made it hard for me to walk. I was told they counted 25 lashes. They wondered how I kept from screaming.

For weeks I couldn't stand up or sit down. The people in the kitchen were nice enough and gave some food to my friends for me. That was a bit of compensation.

## Kasia

Dawn came much too early that day. I was returning from the forest after spending all night looking for food in a neighboring village. I didn't find much—just some cucumbers and one tomato. Now it was getting light and I still had about a mile to go to reach the darker, safer forest. I walked as fast as I could, considering my blistered feet, and the forest gave me relative cover. Darkness was my only shield and protection. Walking in an open field was dangerous.

I heard steps behind me. I kept walking—there was no way for me to run and escape. The steps got closer. After a short while a young woman overtook me and greeted me with a friendly hello. She was young, probably 18 to 20 years old. I don't remember what she was wearing, but I do remember she was pretty and had light blond hair, which she wore in one thick braid. Her eyes were a lovely green. She seemed very compassionate and offered to help me in any way she could.

Her name was Kasia. She was home from the Gymnasium (high school) in Rowno on summer vacation. She helped on her parents' farm, tending the cows early in the morning and at dusk. She had one older brother, Slavko, she told me.

All her suggestions to help me made sense. She could bring food and clothing to a designated area on a regular basis, or she could ask her parents to hide me on their farm. Kasia explained to me that she could put herself in my place and she understood, she said, how difficult it was to live like a hunted animal.

It sounded wonderful to me and she seemed sincere. We agreed to meet the next morning at the edge of the forest. Kasia hugged me and left to gather her cows, and I proceeded to the forest and my pit where I usually spent the days. As I tried to think over the early morning meeting with Kasia, I marveled at my extraordinary good luck. By the time I reached the forest and my pit, I became quite doubtful. How could I trust a complete stranger? I wondered.

All day I was wrestling with the decision of whether or not to meet Kasia early the next morning. Everything seemed too good to be true. I felt a sense of foreboding and dread. It was tempting, but I could not take a chance. Why would a stranger offer help when I didn't ask for it? My instinct dictated caution. I decided against meeting Kasia. That night I stayed in my pit even though I was very hungry. Usually at night I searched for food, but I was afraid of running into Kasia like I had the day before.

When dawn arrived, I climbed a bushy, very full tree and made sure the branches were covering me from view. Soon I heard voices. It was Kasia and a male companion. They were in search of the "little Jew-ess"—me. They were arguing. The man accused Kasia of not being friendly enough to gain my trust. Kasia described her conversation with me and couldn't understand what had gone wrong.

The man who I took to be her brother, Slavko, revealed in a continuing conversation with Kasia what they had planned. The two of them had been hunting down Jews. They robbed them of all their possessions and then took them to the authorities, who gave them a monetary reward before murdering the Jews.

Fear and suspicion saved me that time. I learned a hard lesson: Do not trust anyone. To this day, when I think of Kasia, I think of her betrayal.

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## Aunt Hannah

ESTHER STAROBIN

*Esther Starobin (Rosenfeld) was born in Adelsheim, Germany. She was sent to England by her parents on the Kindertransport in June 1939.*

Yet again I had to go to the post office to retrieve the package from our Aunt Hannah. How embarrassing! The package was none the better after its trip from London to Washington, DC. I had to take the bus with my high school classmates to reach home. Hanging out from the package were arms and legs—yes, several—of woolen underwear. What was Aunt Hannah thinking? No one wore such items in America. How could she think my sisters and I would need them?

My aunt was a tough woman and I doubt she even gave a thought to what people would think of her actions. I have been told she came to Norwich, England, with my oldest sister, Bertl, about a year after I was sent there. She apparently watched everything with an eagle eye. My earliest memory of her is in London when the Harrisons, my foster family, and I went to visit. She lived in a small apartment with Bertl. I have memories of one end of the table being for meat, the other for milk. Bertl told me Aunt Hannah kept strictly kosher.

Aunt Hannah—Hannah Lemberger—one of my mother's sisters, had gone to England via France before I was born. Since she was not a citizen, the only job available to her was as a domestic. When the Kindertransport started, she found homes for my three older sisters. However, mixed with her caring about her sister's children was a fierce temper. Aunt Hannah took Bertl's ration book whenever Bertl threatened to move out. Eventually Aunt Hannah would return the ration book. For years Bertl would not consider baking because that is what Aunt Hannah did when she was angry. As I look back I think life must have been very hard for my aunt.

Aunt Hannah continued to be very concerned about us when we left England after the war to come to the United States. Although she never had a lot of money, she continued to send us packages. Some were better received than the underwear. I remember she once sent a beautiful pocketbook. And when my sisters had enough money to telephone her in London, she spent the entire few minutes telling them to reverse the charges.

Alan, the son of the family I lived with in England, received a scholarship to the London School of Economics. When he first went to London he lived with Aunt Hannah. This arrangement was not a very happy one. Alan's recollection of the time was that there was a lot of tension in the house. Aunt Hannah was living in a house that she had managed to save enough money to purchase from the family that had housed my sister Ruth. She lived there with her friend until her death in 1961.

When I was still in high school, Aunt Hannah came to visit. Since I was home early from school, I was delegated to take her to the kosher butcher's shop. This was my first experience in such a place. Frankly, I was horrified by the back-and-forth conversation between the butcher and the customers. Another day I came home from school and decided to try something from the refrigerator. After I found out I had snacked on brains, I decided I had had enough of my aunt. I went to the next apartment building and spent the evening in my sister and brother-in-law's walk-in closet doing my homework.

Soon after my first daughter was born, Aunt Hannah was diagnosed with breast cancer. Bertl went to London to help out and say her good-byes. My husband, Fred, our daughter, Deborah, and I stayed at Bertl's home to take care of her children while she was away. Aunt Hannah had cared for all of us deeply and made sure we were safe when our parents could not.

Our younger daughter is named for Aunt Hannah.

## The Last Letter

The last letter my parents sent from the camps in France arrived in May 1942. My sister, Bertl, held on to this letter and the others from our parents for 68 years. When she came to live in Washington, DC, in 1947, the letters traveled with her. Bertl has held on to the letters through all her moves in the DC area.

In the late 1980s Bertl first mentioned the letters to my husband and me. After we had them translated, our extended family was able to read the letters and get some appreciation of the great sacrifice our parents made sending their five children to safety. All of my sisters and I have spoken publicly of our experience on the Kindertransport and have often shared excerpts from the letters when we speak. In fact, for a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the deportation of Jews from Baden, Germany, we carried the letters back with us to Adelsheim to share them with the community that was our home before the rise of Nazism.

Bertl and I have often discussed what should happen to these letters in the future. As old age descends, this has become more of a pressing issue. At one time, Bertl was going to hand the letters over to her son for safekeeping. Somehow this never actually happened. While the letters originally were sent to Bertl and our aunt, they were meant for all five of the Rosenfeld children.

A few weeks ago, Bertl told me that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was coming to Leisure World in Silver Spring, Maryland, to talk to survivors and to collect artifacts they wanted to donate. So Bertl made up her mind and requested my company when she met with the people from the Museum's Collections department. Early on a Monday morning I drove out to join Bertl on this mission.

It was a difficult decision for her to give up the letters, her last remnant from our parents' hands, in which our mother wrote, "Stay all well and let us hear some good news from you soon and we send you our dearest love and a thousand greetings." And our father wrote, "My dear good children and Hannah: We hope to find you all well which is the case with us as far as our health is concerned even though the rest leaves a lot to be desired. We would all be very happy to hear what work you do and what you are doing all the time. Also more details of dear little Esther. Hopefully you are all very good and obey dear Hannah because the aunt really only wants your best. For today our best wishes and kisses."

Now our parents become part of the larger picture of what life was like for the people who were victims of the Nazi regime. While we have copies of the letters, the originals will be available to all who want to learn about the people who lived and died during the Holocaust. My hope is that people who read the letters will realize our parents were ordinary people who had the same concerns and hopes for their children as all parents everywhere. I feel in some ways this is our final separation from our parents.

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## The Kiddush Cup

ALFRED TRAUM

*Alfred (Freddie) Traum was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1929. In June 1939, he and his older sister were sent to England on the Kindertransport. Their parents were murdered in the Holocaust.*

It was always the same. Ushering the Sabbath, my father held the silver kiddush cup in the flat palm of his hand with his thumb resting against the brim of the cup, his head held high, his eyes half closed as he recited the blessing over the wine. We all took a sip from the cup. That, together with all the other festive traditional activities, was carried out in proper order. Any bystander would have thought this was just an ordinary Friday night in a Jewish home. So it would have seemed. But I am sure that both our parents' hearts were breaking. My sister and I were leaving for England on the following Tuesday. This would be our last Sabbath dinner together. Although we thought that we would soon be reunited, our parents knew the difficulties that lay ahead. And indeed, it was the last Sabbath meal we shared.

Preparing for the Sabbath actually began Thursdays, with my mother laying out large pieces of round, thinly rolled dough that she would later use to make noodles for soup. She busied herself in the kitchen all evening making mouthwatering selections of cakes that would last through the entire week. We never bought any ready-made cakes. Everything was homemade. That particular week she would need more since many friends and relatives would drop in, say their good-byes, and wish us well on our journey. Friday morning I would watch, as I had watched so many times in the past, as she braided the dough to make the challot and then basted them with egg yolks and lightly sprinkled poppy seeds on them before placing them in the oven. The aromas from the baking and the food preparation permeated our home. A rare and wonderful smell that, even now, can whisk me back in time on the rare occasion when something comes close to it. This was the routine in our home, and very likely in many other Jewish homes in Vienna.

My father was crippled as a result of his service in the Austrian army in World War I. I never really knew what his exact diagnosis was, but he could only get around with the aid of two walking canes. However, when he was seated, there was nothing that he could not do. He had gifted hands that could do so many things and an artistic flair that enabled him to create beautiful drawings and teach others how to use proportions and take perspectives into account. Although he never trained to be a tailor, he handled the sewing machine like a professional, making all kinds of clothes for us and even a new suit for me. He could turn his hands to all sorts of activities, resoling shoes, repairing electrical apparatuses that had ceased to function, and even tinkering with the radio when it went on the blink and somehow managing to get it functioning again. He was also an amateur photographer, doing his own developing and printing. We never went to a photography studio; as a result, I only have small snapshots, which he had made himself. As a little boy I used to watch his every move, picking up many cues that I would store away for use at some future day. He never complained about his handicap. I learned so much from him, but, above all, he taught me how to live with adversity and make the most of it.

Years later, as I developed my own hobbies like rebuilding automobile engines or building an addition to our home, friends used to ask, "Where did you learn to do that?" I would simply shrug my shoulders, but somewhere in the back of my mind was my father telling me "Go ahead, you can do it." Perhaps it sounds far-fetched, but he taught me so much without leaving his chair.

On the Tuesday of my sister's and my departure for England, we all went downstairs to the backyard where my father set up the tripod and camera, placed a black cloth over his head, and focused the camera on us to take our picture. He selected the delayed shutter feature and joined us in the photograph. Our mother was taking us to the West Bahnhof, the railroad station for trains heading west. As we were about to leave,

my father said to me, "Go forward and don't look back." I was never quite sure of what he meant by that statement, but I believe it to have been more philosophical in nature than in the literal manner a small child would take it. However, as the three of us proceeded along the sidewalk but were still a short distance from our home, I did stop and turn around to look back, and just as I expected my father was at the bay window with tears in his eyes, forcing a smile, watching us walk out of his life.

When the photograph had been developed, a copy was sent to us in England. It captured all of our feelings. It is the saddest picture I have ever seen; nevertheless, it is a treasured memento of that day. On one of the negatives my father had written *Der Abschied*. The farewell.

At the train station the platform was crowded with parents coming to see their children off on the Kindertransport and to a new life in England and hoping they would not forget their old lives and those who loved them. It was a special train just for our group, probably a couple of hundred kids, from very little ones, scarcely more than toddlers, up to 17-year-olds.

We stood at an open window holding hands with our mother. She too was fighting back tears, trying to tell us that it would be just for a short while. I don't think she believed her own words, but what else could she say. We were bravely looking at each other, not knowing what to say, when suddenly my classroom teacher, Professor Schwartzbard, appeared in front of us. He knew I was leaving on the Kindertransport on that day and apparently had managed to have his young son accepted too. He was holding his five-year-old son like a piece of luggage under his arm and then he passed him through the open window and asked if his son could sit with us and might I keep an eye out for him until we reach London? In London someone would come to pick him up. Naturally I agreed and immediately I felt grown up, with a newfound responsibility dropped in my lap. A whistle blew and we kissed and hugged through the open window and were reluctant to let go as the train began to pull away. My mother tried running along with the train, holding on to our hands, but not for long. Soon her lonely figure diminished as the train snaked its way out of the station.

All our worldly belongings were packed into two large rucksacks, stuffed to the brim with clothing plus lots of sweets and chocolates that friends and relatives had given us. My parents sent along a very nice box of chocolates for the Griggs family, who had agreed to take us into their home. We were not permitted to bring along any items of value, such as jewelry or money. I took the chance and hid my wristwatch in my pocket, the present my parents had given me on my tenth birthday. However, small snapshots were not considered of value and my sister and I brought several family photos with us. Through the years their value to me has increased enormously since they represent the only visual recollection I have of my former life with my parents.

With this writing I had not intended to write about our time in England but instead to focus on just two dates that punctuated my life. The first, a rather sad day, yet one marked with hope and promise, the 20th of June 1939 when my sister and I left Vienna for England, and the second date, the 24th of June 1958, the happy event of my wedding to Josiane Aizenberg aboard the SS *Zion*, an Israeli passenger liner, while it was docked in New York harbor. My sister had come from Israel to be with us on our special day. She had a very special gift for me, one that she had been saving for such an occasion. It was my father's kiddush cup, the same cup I had seen on so many Friday nights. It came as an utter surprise to me. I had no idea she possessed it.

Apparently, my father took an enormous risk and stuffed the cup in among my sister's clothing, without telling her but knowing she would know what to do with it and when the moment was right to pass it on to me. That moment had come, my wedding. But more important, my father, in parting with his kiddush cup, which he had most likely received at some special occasion, must have been acutely aware of the severity of his and my mother's situation and the doubtfulness of their survival. It is my most prized possession. Every Friday evening, as my family ushers in the Sabbath, the cup graces our table. Perhaps I don't hold it in the same manner as my father did, but I recite the same blessing over the wine and gratefully look around at my family and think how fortunate I am to have had such wonderful parents.





## The Errand

SUSAN WARSINGER

*Susan Warsinger (Hilsenrath) was born in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. She escaped with her brother and was smuggled into France before leaving for the United States in 1941.*

The park, which housed a small museum and a caretaker's cottage, could be entered by walking down a short concrete staircase. It was located across the street from our home and stood between us and the small shopping area of our town. It was a shortcut for me every time my mother asked me to go to the store for some item to prepare our dinner. The errands were of great value for me because they were my first forays into the world. I was doing something that an adult does by having the responsibility of taking care of my family. So it was always with great pride that I strolled through the park, with pfennigs in hand, to accomplish what was needed to nourish my parents, my brothers, and me.

It was a lovely day and many tulips were blooming when I skipped down the steps to the park, on an errand to purchase a loaf of bread at the grocery store. On my way back home, with the bread tucked under my arm, the caretaker approached me with a very forbidding look on his face and told me that I was never to enter his park again. I could not understand this. I told my mother about it immediately upon returning home and asked her to explain the caretaker's actions to me. My parents always tried to protect my two brothers and me from what was happening to the Jewish people in our town. They never told us why the Nazis were boycotting my father's store. They never told me the reason why I had to be taken out of the first grade in public school and attend a one-room school with all the other Jewish children in our town.

My mother, I am sure, tried to protect me again from the cruel custodian in the park and told me that the next time she sent me on an errand I was to walk around the park in order to get to the street on which the market was located. This meant that I needed to hike three times the distance to get to my destination.

It was not many days later when my mother asked me again to purchase a loaf of bread at the grocery store. As I crossed the street, I suddenly decided that I was very tired and I really did not feel like walking the great distance around the park to the store. I looked down the steps and there was no one in sight, so I decided that it was the best thing for me to venture through the park. This time I walked cautiously down the steps.

However, as soon as I got to the bottom, the merciless custodian came rushing out of his cottage and began screaming at me. I ran as fast as I could to try to get to the other end, but not only did he catch up with me but also his daughter was right behind him with rocks in her hand. Both of them were calling me a "dirty Jew" and simultaneously throwing rocks at me. I was a little girl of not more than seven years old and it was the first time that I was afraid and I began to understand how difficult it was going to be to be a Jew in Germany. I never walked through that park again.

## The Tray

Six yellow flowers, four rather aged pieces of vanilla cake, three cookies of different designs that had been around for quite a while, a few pieces of candy that had wrappers with French writing in large red and blue letters, five dates stuffed with coconut, and several doilies cut out of paper napkins daintily peeking out below—the delicacies were all lavishly laid out on a tray that had been used many times. It came out of the old kitchen of the Chateau de Morelles. This brown tray, so carefully decorated, was placed on my bed before I woke up early on my tenth birthday.

My friends and my brother had been collecting their desserts from lunches and dinners for over a week and had been hiding the loot from me up in the attic of the old castle. It was the custom to surprise the celebrant with a gift on the morning of the person's birthday. When I woke up I saw the gift that my friends had so lovingly prepared for me. I knew that this tray contained the favorite morsels they had denied themselves for me. All of this confirmed that I was remembered by the other children. It was something that I needed to feel and hear because I had been separated from my parents for such a long time.

The Chateau de Morelles was in a small village in Brout Vernet, France. This village is not too far from Vichy, where the French puppet government was located after the Nazis invaded the northern part of France. The chateau was just on the outskirts of the village and had a high wall around it with an iron gate that was usually locked. The chateau had fallen into disrepair, with paint peeling off the shutters of the many high windows that surrounded it. The turrets had also been painted white many years ago and now needed a fresh coat of paint. The large veranda, which was reached by a double staircase on each side, had some broken tiles. The rooms inside the chateau were tremendous and the ceiling in one of these rooms was especially high.

My brother and I were part of a group of Jewish children who inhabited the chateau. Most of us had come from Germany and were smuggled into France after the "Night of Broken Glass." Many of us were first in homes in the surrounding area of Paris but then were sent to the southern part of France so that we would be safe from the Nazis. A great many of us had not heard from our parents and did not know where they were living.

My brother and I waited for a long time to get a letter from our beloved parents. When we finally did receive mail from them, they told us about ordinary happenings in their daily life. They did not say anything about the war, nor about how the Nazis treated them and the other Jewish people of our town. They did not mention whether they had received the affidavits to leave Germany to go to America. We knew that any correspondence referring to those issues was dangerous and that a letter containing such information would be confiscated. As a very young child, I wrote in a diary from May to September 1941. I only made two entries that dealt with the war and the Holocaust because I was afraid that the Nazis would find the diary and that I would be punished for writing about their atrocities.

In 1941 we attended the French public school. However, the Jewish children from the chateau were not allowed to go to the same school as the village children because their parents and the officials did not want their children to mingle with us. It was too bad because the children of the farmers could have learned so much from us who came from cosmopolitan areas and had parents of many different professions. We could have shared our cultures and traditions.

We had our classes in one large room, where the children were divided by age and placed into different parts of the room. All of us were taught by one teacher, who was French. He taught French grammar, geography, math, and creative writing in French. In France, there was no school on Thursday and Sunday but children were required to go to school on Saturday. Even though our school was separate from the village school, we too were required to attend class on Saturday, our Jewish holiday. Our chateau was run by Jewish orthodox counselors and teachers who taught us the Jewish orthodox customs and traditions, and we knew that we were not allowed to write and do other schoolwork on Saturday. Our French teacher was kind enough not to make us write on Shabbat. Since all the lessons were presented orally on that day, we felt that we did not break any Jewish orthodox traditions.

All the children at the chateau were assigned jobs, such as helping out with the laundry, hanging up clothes, darning socks, and working in the garden. My favorite assignment was serving food in the dining rooms because it gave me the opportunity to look at the food for a longer period of time, which made me less hungry. Even though the food was adequate, I always wanted more. One day the kitchen staff surprised

us with three strawberries per person. When I was serving these to the children, I found that I did not have any strawberries for the last two children. It was difficult for me to give each of these two children one of my strawberries, a phenomenal treat, but I thought it was the necessary thing to do. Later, on Wednesday, July 30, 1941, I wrote in my diary, "How long is it since I ate chocolate? I have a terrible longing, and my mouth waters when I think of it." But then I wrote how lucky I was because other Jews in Germany were being deprived of strawberries, chocolate, and other delicacies.

Waiting for the day to leave France and come to America was extremely difficult, and we prayed each night in our beds that our turn to leave would arrive soon. Our beds in the dormitories were arranged in four long rows with at least ten beds in each row. We would whisper to each other, revealing our mutual dreams of living a wonderful life in America where we would be reunited with our families.

At least once a week some children's names were called and they were asked to go to the director's office of our chateau. Everyone knew what it was about. They were the lucky ones who had received a passport and a ticket to immigrate to the United States. It was the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society or some other wonderful organization that had sponsored the children and brought about their deliverance to a new land where they wouldn't have to live in fear of the Nazis. We were always happy for the ones who got to leave. But deep down in my heart I always wished that my brother and I were the chosen ones.

Finally, we heard our names called: Susi Hilsenrath and Josef Hilsenrath. The excitement was almost unbearable because we knew we were on our way to America. However, in all this exhilaration, a thought popped into my mind. I was so happy that I was able to save a dessert for the girl in the bed next to me because I knew her birthday was coming up, and I made plans to get that treat on her birthday tray while I was on my voyage to a new life.

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## From Ashes to Life

MARTIN WEISS

*Martin Weiss was born in Polana, Czechoslovakia, and survived Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mauthausen. He was liberated by US troops at the Gunskirchen camp in Austria in 1945.*

After liberation from the concentration camps in 1945, survivors stranded all over Germany and Austria were able to go to displaced persons camps set up by the Allies to be deloused and fed. Thousands of people couldn't digest the food provided and died immediately. I got some of my strength back in one of these Allied camps and I was anxious to go home to search for family members. Then I heard that many people who returned to their countries of origin in Eastern Europe were not welcomed—in some cases Jews were even murdered as they returned. As a result many people decided to stay where they had been liberated.

Just before I was liberated I was lucky to meet up with my cousin Jack, who had been in the Hungarian labor battalions but ended up with me in Gunskirchen, a subcamp of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. After liberation and as soon as I felt strong enough, my cousin Jack and I decided to go home to Polana, Karpatska Russia (now part of Ukraine).

When we arrived in the railroad station in the city of Mukachevo, we ran into an old acquaintance whose name I cannot recall now. This man told Jack and me that my brother, Mendel, had escaped from the Hungarians and that he had settled in Bilka, the town where he had lived after he was married before the war. So my cousin Jack and I parted ways. He continued on to our hometown of Polana and I went to Bilka to find my brother.

To this day I don't know how I managed to get there. I didn't have any money and I wasn't at all familiar with the area. But somehow I found my brother, Mendel.

When Jack got to Polana he met up with his brother, Ernie, and two of our uncles. Ernie and I had been together in another concentration camp, Melk, almost to the end. We had been separated at evacuation. I met up with all of them when I returned home.

At first, our group considered staying in Karpatska, Russia; after all, this was where we were from. We didn't look forward to living under the Russians, but we hoped the area would revert back to Czechoslovakia.

We got the feeling very quickly though that the population was not eager to see us back because it meant that we would reclaim our property. While in Polana, my Uncle Zalman and his group experienced prejudice. For example, my uncle's former neighbor, Tacej Mishka, who was now mayor of the town, had once been a very good friend of my uncle's. They had played chess almost daily and Tacej Mishka had come to my uncle for advice. Tacej Mishka used to let my uncle listen to Radio London at great risk to himself.

When the war was in full swing, Tacej Mishka ran away to Russia and joined the partisans. When he came back he was a hero and he was appointed mayor. Now this very same man, a former friend to my uncle, was telling the townspeople not to give or sell food to the Jews because, he said, the Jews might stay for good if they did so.

From there, my uncles and my cousins went back to Germany and stayed in the DP camps until they immigrated to the United States. As for me, I met up with my sister Cilia, who had survived Bergen-Belsen, and her boyfriend, Fred. They were living in Prague, where they had married. Fred had been on the Russian front as a Hungarian prisoner, like many thousands of other Jewish men. While there, he joined the Czech legion and returned as a liberator. Because he'd spent time in Russia, he guessed that the Russians would

not leave quickly.

Fred, my sister, and I asked for affidavits from my sister, Ellen, who had immigrated to the United States two weeks before the Hungarian occupation. In this way, we were able to immigrate to the United States ourselves. At the time it seemed like a miracle.

## Life in the DP Camps

Life in the displaced persons camps gave people hope for the first time since they left their home. Almost every person there had lost parents, siblings, extended family, and many friends. As people started to feel better, they embraced life with zest. Though they had been dehumanized, sick, and at death's door, many started to marry. In the camps, they made wedding dresses from any material they could find, even parachutes.

I recall thinking that they were crazy. No one in the camps had a home or income, but still they mustered their resources and hopes for a new future. What they possessed was humanity and hope, in spite of their predicaments. Soon many countries opened their doors to Holocaust survivors and people immigrated anywhere that would accept them. Many went to Palestine (later Israel) and many to the United States, South America, and Australia.

Within three years, the camps emptied out and the survivors were refugees no more. The amazing thing was that all these downtrodden and beaten people built the state of Israel, made good citizens in their adopted countries, and raised children and grandchildren. Most didn't look for vengeance. Instead they embraced life.

The atmosphere in Europe was hopeful. People were relieved that the Nazis had lost the war and hoped that all countries would adopt democracy. "Utopia" was often mentioned in conversations and everyone had high hopes for the future. Esperanto, an invented, international language, was mentioned in conversation as a way to improve mankind.

Being young and naïve, I hoped for a world of goodness. Now with more life experiences I realize that some people insist on living in the dark past. They don't allow light and modern thought. They are repressive, autocratic, and anti-democratic; instead of promoting hope and education, they preach hate, vengeance, and death.

In the Western world, we make a constant effort to correct past misdeeds and promote democracy so that all people can have a taste of freedom. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has shown that when you teach tolerance and educate people, the world can be a better place for all mankind.

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